Nasr in the News: *NPS Faculty Member Dr. Vali Nasr in the media spotlight*

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Monterey, California—Department of National Security Affairs faculty member Dr. Vali Nasr, with expertise in Political Islam and Comparative Politics of South Asia and the Middle East, has been widely featured in the press in recent weeks, with several high-profile appearances in both print and broadcast media.

Below are excerpts from several of his recent media appearances, including:

Quick Links

- "Politics in Iran: Shadows of uncertainty," *The Economist*, June 8, 2006.
- "Middle East: Islamic Conflicts and Their Impact on the Future," *NPR's Fresh Air,* July 19, 2006.
- Charlie Rose, "Vali Nasr Discusses His New Book, 'The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future,'" *The Charlie Rose Show*, July 27, 2006.
- Jon Stewart, "Celebrity Interview with Dr. Vali Nasr," *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, August 1, 2006.
- Peter Waldman, "*Ancient Rift:* Rising Academic Sees Sectarian Split Inflaming Mideast: Vali Nasr Says 'Shiite Revival' Is met by Sunni Backlash," *The Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2006.
- Nader Hashemi, "Shia Crescent rising," *The Globe and Mail*, August 12, 2006.
- Shaul Bakhash, "Reading Jefferson in Tehran," *The Washington Post,* August 13, 2006.
- Irshad Manji , "Muslim Against Muslim," *New York Times Sunday Book Review*, August 13, 2006.
- Steve Inskeep, "Lebanon Conflict Diverts Attention From Iran," *NPR's Morning Edition*, August 17, 2006.
- Judith Latham, "Author Vali Nasr Discusses Growing Political Power of Shi'a Muslims," *Voice of America News*, August 17, 2006. (For full audio of the program Press Conference USA click here.)

- David Gregory, "Transcript for Aug. 20: John McCain, Barry McCaffrey, Vali Nasr, John Harwood," *Meet the Press*, August 20, 2006. (A video link is available for viewing by clicking here.)
- Seymour Hersh, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's interests in Israel's war," *New Yorker Magazine*, August 21, 2006.
- Masood Farivar, "Book Shelf: A Faith Divided: Will Sunni-Shia war engulf the new Middle East?," *Wall Street Journal,* August 22, 2006.
- Trudy Rubin, "Shock over Lebanon could turn Shiites against U.S.," *The Baltimore Sun,* August 22, 2006.
- Matthew B. Stannard, "Iran asks to start nuclear bargaining: Offer to U.N. on enrichment called complex and vague," *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23 2006.
- Jason Motlagh, "Iran's 'crisis' of overconfidence," *Asia Times Online*, August 26, 2006.

The Economist

Dr. Vali Nasr's recent book, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, co-authored with Ali Gheissari, was reviewed in the June 8, 2006 edition of *The Economist*, in the article titled "Politics in Iran: Shadows of uncertainty":

> IF EVER policymakers in Washington, DC, needed a slim, thoughtful account of Iran's experiments with pluralism and democracy, now surely is the time. Ali Gheissari, a historian at the University of San Diego, and Vali Nasr, who teaches political science at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California, set out to challenge the assumption that modern Iranian history is essentially about the conflict between Iranian regimes and their citizens. In doing so, they implicitly challenge the neoconservative belief that this conflict is approaching a climax. Too pat, say the authors: Iranians' failure to resolve a different tension, involving national ambition and risk, explains why their country's century-long transition to democracy shows no sign of being brought to a conclusion.
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> The authors argue that ever since 1906, when a coalition of clerical grandees, progressive intellectuals and bazaar traders forced the shah of the time to promulgate Iran's first constitution and establish a parliament, Iranians have been struggling to accommodate the competing attractions of liberty and the rule of law, on one hand, and stability—often imposed with an iron fist—on the other. From the 1940s until recently, the authors assert, this task was complicated by the ideologies of nationalism, socialism and militant Islamism. All were opposed to monarchical tyranny, but none was very democratic.
>
> The authors show how the constitutional movement of a century ago spawned a frail parliamentary democracy that was further weakened by tribal uprisings, some of them stirred up by foreign powers. The result was popular support—to start with, at least—for the autocratic Shah Reza Pahlavi, who set Iran on a path of centralised development before the Allies toppled him in 1941 for being too close to the Nazis. And so on; cycles of authoritarianism and laxity, feeding from and reacting to each other, characterised the reign of Reza's son and successor, Muhammad Reza, until he fled the Islamic revolutionaries of 1979.
>
> Messrs Gheissari and Nasr cast doubts on the credentials of some iconic figures in Iran's democratic pantheon. Muhammad Mossadegh, for instance, a nationalist prime minister who was famously toppled by the CIA in 1953 and remains a hero for many progressive Iranians, "did not advocate individual rights and liberal democracy as those terms are

understood today, although later historical accounts have attributed such advocacy to him." The authors find that true democrats, in the Western sense, were strongest before and immediately after the revolution; they were swiftly overwhelmed by the supporters of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The Islamic Republic that followed—a "pragmatic authoritarian regime" that has held no fewer than 37 national elections—has further muddied the picture. The authors find that democratic instincts have flourished to a surprising degree in this most ideological and centralised of political systems, while avoiding the trap of pitting Iranian democrats neatly against their rulers. When he was elected president in 1997, Muhammad Khatami, a cleric and a son of the revolution, proposed a strikingly democratic manifesto, full of references to civil society and the rule of law, and promised to improve women's rights.

Mr. Khatami was thwarted by his own timidity and by the despotism of the conservative forces ranged against him. But Iranians did not react, as many had anticipated, by turning their backs on the Islamic Republic. The 2005 presidential election was judged to have been "one of the most dynamic and innovative in Iran's history", even though the ruling clerics set strict limits on who was entitled to run and voters elected Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, an Islamist ideologue who had spoken disdainfully of democracy. And so it has proved; as president, Mr. Ahmadinejad has behaved as a populist, not a pluralist.

"A century after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906," Messrs Gheissari and Nasr conclude, "Iran is still grappling with how to achieve a democratic state." The ability of outsiders to nudge the country in a hopeful direction remains limited. As this book makes clear, foreign interference has often led to more authoritarianism, and to the ascendancy of Iran's "state-building" tendency over its "democracy-building" one. This is what seems to be happening now. Citing foreign threats, the state is gradually increasing its control over many areas of Iranians' lives. America's pro-democracy efforts may already be having unintended consequences.

NPR's Fresh Air

On July 19, 2006, Dr. Nasr appeared on *NPR's Fresh Air with Terry Gross*, produced by WHYY in Philadelphia. In "Middle East: Islamic Conflicts and Their Impact on the Future," Dr. Nasr talked about the latest developments there, and about his book *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future.*

To listen to a replay of this episode of *Fresh Air*, please click here.

The Charlie Rose Show

On July 27, 2006, Dr. Nasr appeared in the first segment of *The Charlie Rose Show*, where he discussed his new book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future* and the current struggles taking place within Islam in the Middle East.

This episode of *The Charlie Rose Show* is available for download from Google Video for $0.99 by clicking here.

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart

On August 1, 2006, Dr. Nasr appeared in a "Celebrity Interview" on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, where he spoke about the state of the Middle East and discussed his book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future.*

To listen to a replay of his interview, please click here.

The Wall Street Journal

Dr. Nasr was profiled by Peter Waldman in "Ancient Rift: Rising Academic Sees Sectarian Split Inflaming Mideast: Vali Nasr Says 'Shiite Revival' Is met by Sunni Backlash," a front page story in the August 4, 2006 edition of *The Wall Street Journal*. An excerpt follows below:

> WASHINGTON -- As Vali Nasr dashed for the airport last week after briefing a small group of academics and policy makers here, a hand pulled the political scientist aside.
>
> "That was the most coherent, in-depth and incisive discussion of the religious situation in the Middle East that I've heard in any setting," said Richard Land, a Southern Baptist leader and influential conservative.
>
> Sen. Joseph Biden, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, heaped similar praise on Mr. Nasr in May for giving what Mr. Biden called the most "concise and coherent" testimony on Iran he had ever heard.
>
> From the violence in the Mideast, new realities are emerging -- and a new generation of experts to interpret them. Shiite Muslims are asserting themselves as never before. Followers of this branch of Islam, generally backbenchers in the region's power game, are central players in Lebanon, Iran and Iraq -- often acting out against traditional powers such as Israel, the U.S., and Sunni Arab states.
>
> Mr. Nasr, a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., calls this a historic "Shiite revival" and has gone further than most in identifying it as a central force in Mideast politics. He also frames a possible U.S. response: Engage Iran, especially over the issue of reducing violence in Iraq, and try to manage Tehran's rise as a regional power rather than isolating it.
>
> The issues are more than academic for the 46-year-old professor. He was raised in Tehran and hails from a prominent intellectual and literary family in Iran that traces its lineage to the prophet Muhammad. His father was once president of Iran's top science university and chief of staff for the shah's wife.
>
> In 1979, after the Iranian revolution, the Nasrs "started from zero" in the U.S., says Mr. Nasr. He received a doctorate in political science from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, writing his thesis on the political dimensions of radical Islam, while his father, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, became a renowned professor of Islamic studies at George Washington University.
>
> The younger Mr. Nasr has laid out his views in a series of speeches and articles, as well as a new book. He is gaining a wide hearing in Washington. "The problem with the current Middle East debate is it's completely stuck. Nobody knows what to do," says political economist Francis Fukuyama of Johns Hopkins University, who attended Mr.

> Nasr's private briefing last week. "Vali Nasr offers a plausible alternative that may gain traction."
>
> Mr. Nasr's analysis begins with the idea that the removal of Saddam Hussein in Iraq has transformed the Mideast, but not in the ways promised by President Bush. By replacing Iraq's Sunni-led dictatorship with an elected government dominated by the country's Shiite majority, the U.S. destroyed the Sunni wall that had contained the restless Shiite power to the east, Iran. The clerical regime in Tehran was immeasurably strengthened...

The complete article may be viewed by clicking here.

The Globe and Mail

In the August 12, 2006 edition of Toronto's *Globe and Mail* newspaper, Nader Hashemi reviews Dr. Nasr's book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future*, in the article titled "Shia Crescent rising":

> The balance of power seems to be shifting, new actors have emerged on the scene, old certainties are being challenged and new alliances are being formed. The status quo as we have known it is changing. How can we make sense of these changes, and to what extent should the West be worried? To understand these developments better, Vali Nasr's *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future* is highly recommended.
>
> Nasr is a professor of Middle East and South Asian politics at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., and an adjunct senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. He is a recognized world authority on Islamic fundamentalism, with an impressive resumé and publication record. This book is a departure from his valuable academic work and his first foray into writing for a general audience. It is a successful one. In terms of clarity, insight and relevance to our post-9/11 world, *The Shia Revival* is arguably the best book on the market that provides a critical background to the emotionally charged events we have been witnessing in Iraq, Iran, Lebanon and beyond.
>
> Nasr's argument is that the millennium-old Sunni hegemony in the Muslim world is being challenged by a new Shia assertiveness, and that the "character of the region will be decided in the crucible of a Shia revival and the Sunni response to it." Like the Protestant-Catholic conflict that marked the transition to modernity in the West, the Muslim world is undergoing a contestation and transformation between rival religious communities. While history and theology fuel the dispute, Nasr argues that the debate is less about doctrinal differences and more about political power, identity politics and a desire for group recognition.
>
> Nasr astutely observes that even though Shias comprise only 10 to 15 per cent of the 1.3 billion world Muslim population, in "the Islamic heartland, from Lebanon to Pakistan... there are roughly as many Shias as there are Sunnis, and around the economically and geostrategically sensitive rim of the Persian Gulf, Shias constitute 80 per cent of the population." He clearly states, however, that the Shia revival is not about "pan-Shiism," but rather about enhancing stronger cultural and religious ties, along with a new awareness among Shia political movements. As in post-Saddam Iraq, Shias increasingly believe that gains in political power should be solidified and enhanced, but only within the framework of existing Lebanese, Iraqi, Kuwaiti and Pakistani nationalisms.

> Nasr lists three pillars of the new Shia revival: "the newly empowered Shia majority in Iraq, the current rise of Iran as a regional leader, and the empowerment of Shias across Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE and Pakistan." These pillars are "interconnected, and each reinforces the others. Together they ensure a greater Shia voice in Middle East politics and are pressing events toward a new power distribution in the region."
>
> *The Shia Revival* contains a very rich and readable overview of the various currents within Shia political thought. Nasr's dissection of and contrast between Ayatollah Sistani's moderation (in Iraq) and Ayatollah Khomeini's radicalism (in Iran) demonstrates that Shia politics is far from monolithic. There is also much good history, political context and a discussion of future regional trends in the book. Nasr's discussion of Iraqi politics, the players involved, the positions they represent and the implications for the country's future are extremely well-reasoned and persuasively argued.

The Washington Post

In "Reading Jefferson in Tehran" (*The Washington Post,* August 13, 2006), George Mason University historian Shaul Bakhash reviews *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* by Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, noting that "one member of President Bush's 'axis of evil' has a surprising democratic heritage." He writes:

> But as Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr remind us, Iran also has a democratic tradition—or, at least, a tradition of aspiring toward democracy. The 1906 Constitutional Revolution wrested power away from the ruling Qajar dynasty and vested it in the people. The few years immediately following World War II witnessed a brief interregnum of genuine parliamentary politics. And even the Islamic Revolution of 1979 resulted in part from a demand for accountable government and democratic rights and a loathing for the shah's autocracy. In the late 1990s, Iran experienced a remarkable, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, democracy movement led by the country's reformist former president, Mohammad Khatami.
>
> Gheissari, a University of San Diego historian, and Nasr, a Middle East specialist at the Naval Postgraduate School and author of the recent *The Shia Revival* , argue quite rightly that the aspiration for democracy in Iran has always been intertwined with the aspiration for a strong state.

Bakhash adds:

> Iran 's struggle with democracy, the authors sensibly argue, has to be understood in the context of its history and culture. We also must consider how Iran's political activists and intelligentsia framed debates over ruling the country. In the 1990s, Gheissari and Nasr point out, Iranian intellectuals embraced the idea of civil society because they had learned from hard experience that the Marxist or Islamist ideologies they formerly espoused led to untrammeled state power…
>
> Gheissari and Nasr provide us with a clear and readable account of politics in the Islamic Republic but not—as they set out to do—an analytic framework for understanding the tension in Iran between a more effective government and a more democratic one. They also shed little light on the meaning of the Iranian legacy for the larger Muslim world, which is also grappling with how to provide more open systems of government. The book also says surprisingly little about how Islam has influenced the ways in which Iran's elites and other social classes have understood the proper role of government or the meaning

> of individual rights; not enough on the competition of ideas—democratic, theocratic, autocratic—that shape Iran's politics today; and not nearly enough on the reasons for the continued strength of the country's autocratic tradition and the relative weakness of its civil society.
>
> It is possible that in Iran, as elsewhere in the Middle East, politics has remained too much the domain of political and intellectual elites that failed to build durable civil institutions such as parties, unions and independent newspapers; that the general public has only sporadically entered the political arena; and that these difficulties are themselves the products of a culture, history and social structure that will not be easily changed. *Democracy in Iran* encourages readers to think hard about these intriguing questions, but it does not answer them.

The New York Times Sunday Book Review

In the August 13, 2006 *The New York Times Sunday Book Review*, Irshad Manji cites Dr. Nasr in "Muslim Against Muslim":

> Americans may be paying more attention to Muslim conflicts now. They had better. In "The Shia Revival," a fast-moving, engaging and ultimately unnerving book, Vali Nasr writes that wars within Islam "will shape the future."
>
> A professor at the Naval Postgraduate School and an occasional adviser to the American government, Nasr argues that Operation Iraqi Freedom has tilled the soil for a "new" Middle East—one fueled less by the ideal of democracy than by an age-old animosity between Islam's two major sects, the majority Sunnis and minority Shiites.

NPR's Morning Edition

Dr. Nasr appeared on *NPR's Morning Edition* on August 17, 2006, in "Lebanon Conflict Diverts Attention From Iran," during which Steve Inskeep talked with Dr. Nasr about the conflict's regional impact. Dr. Nasr explained how the war in southern Lebanon has drawn attention away from other issues in the Middle East, like negotiations between the United States and Iran over Iran's nuclear program.

To listen to a replay of this episode of *Morning Edition,* please click here.

Voice of America

On August 17th, *Voice of America* featured Dr. Nasr in a report on his recent book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future.* In "Author Vali Nasr Discusses Growing Political Power of Shi'a Muslims" (*VOA News*, August 17, 2006), Judith Latham explains:

> Vali Nasr, author of the recently published book, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam Will Shape the Future*, says that, by toppling Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq in 2003, the U.S.-led coalition unintentionally strengthened Iraq's Shi'a majority and helped

launch a broad Shi'a revival that could upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and in the Middle East for years to come. Author Vali Nasr is one of the leading experts on Muslim politics. As a consultant to the Department of State, he has provided expert testimony to the US Senate on the Islamic world.

Speaking with host Carol Castiel of VOA News Now's Press Conference USA, Vali Nasr, who is Professor of Middle East and South Asia politics at the Naval Post-Graduate School in La Jolla, California, explains that the split between Sunni and Shi'a Islam dates back to the period after the death of the Prophet Mohammed when there was a dispute over his rightful successor. And over time, each of the two sects developed its own approach to law and to interpreting the faith. Early in their history, Professor Nasr says, the Shi'a were marginalized by the dominant Sunni majority, and many of their leaders were killed. Only in Iran, whose Persian population converted to Shi'a Islam in the 16th century, were the Shi'a able to dominate politically. Professor Nasr says what binds the Shi'a together today is their attachment to the shrine cities of Iraq and to the clerics and the ayatollahs, the most important of whom is Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Vali Nasr notes that Iraq is the only Arab country where the Shi'a currently hold political power. In Bahrain, the Shi'a are a majority, and in Lebanon, they have a plurality. In Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, they represent a sizable minority. In the non-Arab world, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan have large Shi'a minority populations. And Azerbaijan is actually a majority Shi'a nation.

But Professor Nasr says that, with the current "Shi'a revival," the Shi'a are demanding a "place at the table." And he adds, Iraq has "set the stage," showing that the shift from Sunni to Shi'a power will "not happen easily." He notes that in Saudi Arabia, where the conservative Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam formed an alliance with the House of Saud in the 19th century, there is an especially "bloody legacy" between the Sunnis and Shi'a. Furthermore, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran was particularly threatening to Saudi Arabia, and since then the rivalry between the two nations for influence in the Middle East has increased.

Vali Nasr says that in the recent war in Lebanon the "sectarian card was put on the table" by the Sunnis—when Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt initially criticized Hezbollah for its cross border raid into Israel. But Iran and Hezbollah had bet on rising above that sectarianism by "rallying everyone around Israel," Professor Nasr says. Professor Nasr adds that in Lebanon, where the Shi'a are actually the largest confessional group (45 percent), they lack commensurate political power, a situation that could ultimately lead to civil war.

Professor Nasr says Washington's greatest challenge in the region is to promote stability—first by encouraging a "sustainable" ceasefire in Lebanon, next by preventing Iraq from descending into a deeper conflict, and then by engaging with Iran and determining just what "carrots and sticks are available." Vali Nasr argues that talking with Iran does not mean "recognizing" Iran, but it does mean adding a "diplomatic channel" to the current U.S. "arsenal." He suggests that it will be necessary for the Iraqi Shi'a and the Kurds to make "serious constitutional compromises" with the Sunnis. Professor Nasr says it was Sunni resistance to Shi'a power that has pushed Iraq in Iran's direction.

For full audio of the program Press Conference USA click here.

Meet the Press

On the August 20, 2006 edition of NBC's *Meet the Press*, Dr. Nasr was interviewed by David Gregory, sitting in for Tim Russert, as part of a roundtable on Iraq with retired General Barry McCaffrey and John Harwood. Senator John McCain was interviewed earlier in the broadcast. A transcript may be viewed at: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14390980/

Dr. Nasr's comments in particular may be found at the following page-links:

- Page 5: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14390980/page/5/
- Page 6: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14390980/page/6/
- Page 7: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14390980/page/7/

A video link is available for viewing at:

- Video Link: http://video.msn.com/v/us/msnbc.htm?f=00&t=s53&g=e10461f7-89e1-415c-aa58-80d1b6f8066e&p=hotvideo_m_edpicks

Below are excerpts from the transcript:

> DAVID GREGORY: Coming next, Iraq, sectarian violence, the insurgency and the political fallout in 2006. Our roundtable with Dr. Vali Nasr, retired General Barry McCaffrey and John Harwood. It's next.
>
> …And welcome all. Dr. Vali Nasr, you write in "The Shia Revival," but also in an article in this month's Foreign Affairs magazine, that the war in Iraq has profoundly changed the Middle East, but not in the way that the United States necessarily anticipated. We'll put a piece of that article on our screen. You write, "When the U.S. government toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003, it thought regime change would help bring democracy to Iraq and then to the rest of the region. The Bush administration thought of politics as the relationship between individuals and the state, and so it failed to recognize that people in the Middle East see politics also as the balance of power among communities. Rather than viewing the fall of Saddam as an occasion to create a liberal democracy, therefore, many Iraqis viewed it as an opportunity to redress injustices in the distribution of power among the country's major communities. By liberating and empowering Iraq's Shiite majority, the Bush administration helped launch a broad Shiite revival that will upset the sectarian balance in Iraq and the Middle East for years to come." How upset is that balance right now, Dr. Nasr? Is it civil war?
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> DR. VALI NASR: Not yet, but it seems that all sides are acting as if they're expecting it to happen. You know, building their forces, they're trying to get a strong position within Baghdad itself, they're ethnic cleansing the neighborhoods. And the forces that are keeping that country together are gradually losing ground to the forces that are pulling it apart.
>
> DAVID GREGORY: How badly did we miscalculate the way Iraqis would view the toppling of Saddam? In other words, did we miscalculate that they would think about being Iraqis before being Sunni or Shia?
>
> DR. NASR: Right. We, we assumed that there is a uniform civil society and civil order in that country. We forgot that the last 10 years of Saddam's rule were essentially a sectarian government and that once you take the pressure lid off, that what comes to the fore most immediately is the way in which each side has viewed its political position.

But also, we weren't in it—we didn't have sufficient troops, we didn't have a plan to prevent this from festering and really growing roots. And now we're sort of playing catch-up with the essential political momentum of this country, which is mostly sectarian.

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DAVID GREGORY: Dr. Vali Nasr, let's talk a little bit more broadly about the Shia revival, that is, of course, the title of your book. You talk particularly about Iran...

DR. NASR: Mm-hmm.

DAVID GREGORY: ...exploiting the fact that the Sunni wall has been taken down from all around its borders from Iraq and in Afghanistan. What are the consequences, then, of this broader Shia revival?

DR. NASR: Well, we're seeing it reflected in the current war in Lebanon, where Iran essentially came to the floor as a major power broker holding most of the cards, and we saw that our traditional allies in the region were, were marginalized. What we're seeing at this time period is, as conflicts are occurring in Iraq and in, in Lebanon, the major patron of the Shia side in this Iran is becoming increasingly a regional power. It's able to assert its position in Lebanon, in Iraq. It has claims of, of influence in these places. And also it wants the international community to recognize its nuclear program and accord it its influence in the region.

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GEN. McCAFFREY: Well, I—you know, first of all, I applaud the efforts by Secretary Rice and by others, Steve Hadley, trying to start the beginnings of building an alliance to confront the Iranians. The notion that we can threaten them with conventional air attack is simply insane. First of all, we're more vulnerable than they are to having the Persian Gulf closed, to leaving 135,000 troops 400 kilometers up into Iraq with a Shia population on our supply lines. Never mind our allies who I think are terrified by this, the—you know, the notion that we would use air power to go after 70-some odd nuclear sites.

The Iranians are going nuclear. It's going to change the region for the worse in the coming 10 years, and hopefully not provoke the proliferation of WMD, where you end up with an Arab Sunni bomb to counter the Persian Shia bomb. So I think the answer to this one is diplomatic, economic: build alliances, stop threatening military action.

DAVID GREGORY: Dr. Nasr, on that point?

DR. NASR: I do agree with the general. First of all, there's very little—the only difference I would have is that our allies in the region are not going to be able to do much. In other words, the ascendant forces in this region are with Iran. Hezbollah is a pro-Iranian force and in Iraq also, the upper hand is going to be with the Shia militias who are now very pro-Iranian. And Iran has the capability to fight the U.S. if it comes to multiple different arenas: in Iraq, in Lebanon, in Afghanistan as well. So I do think that we have to have a much more nuanced and much more effective diplomatic strategy of dealing with Iran, in terms of being able to contain and regulate its power. Because a frontal confrontation I don't think will work, and as we saw with Israel and Hezbollah, it can actually be counterproductive. You're going to turn Ahmadinejad into a second Hassan Nasrallah, strengthen the Iranian government and you—and not accomplish what you want in terms of curtailing its nuclear capabilities.

DAVID GREGORY: You actually suggest direct dialogue, negotiations with the Iranians between the Iranians and the U.S. government at this stage.

DR. NASR: I think that we are—what our strategy's lacking is having a diplomatic tool. Everything we have in our sort of tool bag is, is, is military threats and threats of sanctions and trying to build a regional alliance—a regional containment strategy around Iran, none of which has worked so far and are not likely to work. And I think we should have a diplomatic strategy vis-a-vis Iran, one that does not outsource U.S. diplomacy to the French or to the Saudis, but rather we deal with Iran as we dealt with China, with the Soviet Union. It does not mean we give them a pass on a host—whole host of things—democratic reform, terrorism.

MR. HARWOOD: And yet you still have within the neoconservative wing of the Republican Party support for more confrontation with Iran, and that's one of the areas of emerging split. You know, you've got some intellectual ferment on the right. George Will, influential conservative columnist, recently said this strategy is completely unrealistic. But you do have some who continue to believe in what the president's doing, who want more force and more ability to confront Iran.

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DAVID GREGORY: Dr. Nasr, I'll give you the final word on this, on this question of what's next in Iraq. What is the tipping point, for you, that you'll look for?

DR. NASR: I think it's in the number of dead, first of all, that, that has been escalating. And I think we're reaching a very close—close to the edge, where essentially, the number of people being killed per day, whether or not we call it a civil war or civil conflict, convinces the people in—on the ground that the political process of trying to build security forces, build a central government in Iraq, is no longer working. That the game is actually being played out by the militias, and they're the ones who are deciding the fate of that country. And if the U.S. is not really able to control the violence, it essentially means to the Iraqis that its presence is largely irrelevant to the end game. And I think the number of the dead will, will, will suggest that.

DAVID GREGORY: We will leave it there. Vali Nasr, General Barry McCaffrey, and John Harwood, thanks to all of you. And we'll be right back.

New Yorker Magazine

In his latest article on the recent Israeli war against Hezbollah, "Watching Lebanon: Washington's interests in Israel's war," Seymour Hersh (*New Yorker Magazine*, August 21, 2006) interviews Dr. Nasr, writing:

> There is evidence that the Iranians were expecting the war against Hezbollah. Vali Nasr, an expert on Shiite Muslims and Iran, who is a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and also teaches at the Naval Postgraduate School, in Monterey, California, said, "Every negative American move against Hezbollah was seen by Iran as part of a larger campaign against it. And Iran began to prepare for the showdown by supplying more sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah—anti-ship and anti-tank missiles—and training its fighters in their use. And now Hezbollah is testing Iran's new weapons. Iran sees the Bush Administration as trying to marginalize its regional role, so it fomented trouble."

Nasr, an Iranian-American who recently published a study of the Sunni-Shiite divide, entitled “The Shia Revival,” also said that the Iranian leadership believes that Washington’s ultimate political goal is to get some international force to act as a buffer—to physically separate Syria and Lebanon in an effort to isolate and disarm Hezbollah, whose main supply route is through Syria. “Military action cannot bring about the desired political result,” Nasr said. The popularity of Iran’s President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a virulent critic of Israel, is greatest in his own country. If the U.S. were to attack Iran’s nuclear facilities, Nasr said, “you may end up turning Ahmadinejad into another Nasrallah—the rock star of the Arab street.”

Wall Street Journal

In the August 22, 2006 edition of the *Wall Street Journal,* Masood Farivar’s Bookshelf article, “A Faith Divided: Will Sunni-Shia war engulf the new Middle East?” examines Dr. Nasr’s work:

As violence rages in Iraq, it has become ever more difficult to make sense of it all. Undoubtedly some is the work of terrorists bent on disrupting the democratic process, some the work of Sunnis and Baathists angry at their loss of power. But to Vali Nasr, author of "The Shia Revival," most of the current violence is part of a broad sectarian conflict. The fall of Saddam Hussein, he argues, has indeed given birth to a "new Middle East"--but not yet the one hoped for. We are now seeing the Shia of Islam, newly empowered in Iraq and ever more militant in Iran, challenge the Sunnis--Islam's dominant sect--in a conflict that will take years to resolve, if not decades.

Like many modern-day sectarian rifts, this one predates the modern era--in this case, by well more than a millennium. In the succession crisis that followed the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the majority of Muslims elected as caliph one of the Prophet's closest companions. A minority dissented, arguing that the Prophet had passed the leadership of his community to Ali, his cousin and son-in-law. The dissenters became known as "Shiat-Ali," or Partisans of Ali. The followers of Muhammad's "Sunna," or tradition, became known as Sunnis. In time, each side developed what Mr. Nasr calls a distinct "ethos of faith and piety."

The Shia got their wish when Ali became the fourth caliph, but the pivotal moment in Shia history came in 680 when Ali's son Hussein and 72 of his followers were massacred in the desert of southern Iraq after challenging the authority of Islam's sixth caliph. For the Shia, Hussein came to symbolize resistance to tyranny; his martyrdom is commemorated to this day as a central act of Shia piety.

With the exception of a few short-lived Shia dynasties (Iraq is not the first Shia Arab state), the Shia never really wielded political power, living mostly as a marginalized minority under Sunni rule. This historical experience, Mr. Nasr observes, has long imbued the Sunnis with a sense of "worldly success," and a presumption of mastery, while furnishing the Shia underdogs with a narrative of "martyrdom, persecution, and suffering."

Mr. Nasr uses this history to explain why Iraq's Shia so eagerly embraced the fall of Saddam Hussein. Whereas the Americans saw regime change in Iraq as a harbinger of democracy, Iraq's Shia viewed it primarily as the end to centuries of Sunni domination. And Saddam's fall inevitably stirred hopes for a Shia revival elsewhere. The mantra "one man, one vote" has reverberated among the politically marginalized Shia of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Lebanon, where Hezbollah's TV station has recited democracy's shibboleths as part of its own campaign to win a larger political role.

All this agitation has alarmed the region's Sunni leaders, Mr. Nasr observes, and not just the Sunni fundamentalists. King Abdullah of Jordan has warned about the emergence of a "Shia crescent" slicing across the region; Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has questioned the Shia's Arab loyalties. Certainly both Egypt and Jordan--and many other nations in the region--have reason to be concerned about the rise of a Shia-dominated Iraq allying with Iran, the Mideast's other Shia powerhouse.

Mr. Nasr is at his best when he explains the historical ties among Shia, not least among Shia in Iran and Iraq. It was thought, before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, that a new Iraq would turn away from Iran because of the profound cultural differences between Arabs and Persians and because of their widely different historical experience. It is true that Iraq is unlikely to follow Iran's theocratic model-- Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani is the follower of the most vocal clerical critic of the late Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of Iran's current theocracy. But ties between the Shia of Iran and Iraq have grown stronger since the invasion, Mr. Nasr notes, and Tehran, he believes, holds the key to stability in Iraq. Thus Mr. Nasr urges the U.S. to normalize its relations with Iran, despite the heated rhetoric of recent months and quarrels over the intent of Iran's nuclear program.

It must be said that Mr. Nasr supports his arguments by over-citing extremists on both sides of the sectarian divide. There is no doubt that such extremists play a role, intensifying the crisis and propelling the violence. But such an approach, on Mr. Nasr's part, has the effect of playing down unfairly the many moderate participants in these debates who aim at reconciliation and who respect the normal give-and-take of politics. In short, the Sunni-Shia divide does not yet even begin to approach the division, within Christianity, that incited the long and bloody Wars of Religion in the 16th and 17th centuries.

More important, Mr. Nasr minimizes a reality at odds with his thesis: Religious extremism and anti-Americanism cut across sectarian lines. The strategic alliance directed at the U.S.—Iran, Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas--is half Sunni and half Shia. What is more, the region's other great powers—Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria--are overwhelmingly Sunni. Thus if the Shia are to gain rights in these countries, they are going to have to do so as citizens of each rather than as members of a pan-Shia movement.

Mr. Nasr urges the Bush administration to engage the region's Shia before it worries about the spread of democracy. But it was democracy that brought the Shia to power, and it will be democracy that will redress their centuries-old sense of injustice.

Baltimore Sun

In her August 22, 2006 op/ed, "Shock over Lebanon could turn Shiites against U.S.," Trudy Rubin also cites Dr. Nasr:

If you want to understand the wider repercussions of the war between Hezbollah and Israel, buy a brilliant and very readable new book called *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts Within Islam Will Shape the Future.*

The author, Vali Nasr, is a professor at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif., and a top expert on Shiite Islam and the historic conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims. He just briefed President Bush on internal Iraqi religious and political dynamics. One can only wish the meeting had come three years sooner.

The United States is now caught in the middle of the Shiite-Sunni conflict in Baghdad, and the Lebanon war has worsened the precarious U.S. position. This sectarian struggle will determine the outcome of America's Iraq venture. Nasr believes it will shape the future of the entire Middle East.

Shiites make up only 10 percent to 15 percent of the world's 1.3 billion Muslims. U.S. Mideast policy has traditionally been focused on Sunni countries led by Arab allies in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. But as Nasr points out: "In the Islamic heartland from Lebanon to Pakistan, there are roughly as many Shias as there are Sunnis," and around the geopolitically sensitive Persian Gulf, Shiites constitute 89 percent of the population.

Nasr gives a fascinating short course on the historical differences between Shiites and Sunnis, which stem from a dispute over who were the rightful heirs to the Prophet Muhammad. The Shiites believe his direct descendants should have inherited the mantle, starting with his cousin and son-in-law, Ali. Sunnis endorsed the Prophet's companions and slaughtered Ali's son Hussayn, whose death precipitated a historic Shiite embrace of martyrs. But the differences go deeper. Sunnis emphasized order and coming to terms with secular rulers. Shiites are searching for justice and look to clerics for guidance.

Before 1993, the only country ruled by Shiites was Persian Iran. Shiites were marginalized and persecuted in the Sunni Arab world and disdained by Sunni fundamentalists as apostates. Then came the war in Iraq, which altered the power balance in the Middle East.

When the United States toppled Saddam Hussein, it upended a regime whose Sunni leaders repressed a predominantly Shiite population. U.S. leaders thought Iraq was dominated by a secular middle class. They believed an Iraqi democracy led by elected Shiite officials would encourage Iranian Shiites to overthrow their regime.

Reality bit hard. Iraq's Shiite majority was predominantly religious. Shiite political leaders, who had spent their exile years in Tehran, would not drop their ties with the Iranians.

By removing Mr. Hussein, the United States made Shiite Iran the strongest power in the region. Urged on by their ayatollahs, Iraq's Shiite majority voted in the second Shiite-led government in the region, dominated by religious parties. This Shiite revival helped other minority Shiite movements in the region, such as Lebanon's Hezbollah, to strengthen their position.

Mr. Nasr believes this Shiite ascendancy need not have been a negative for the region. Iraq's preeminent Shiite cleric, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, is a moderate who accepts the idea of inclusive, constitutional government (with a strong role for clerics in the background).

But U.S. missteps in Iraq opened the door to a virulent Sunni insurgency that deliberately targeted Shiite civilians. The late Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and his al-Qaida followers in Iraq wanted a civil war and used hatred of Shiites to recruit Sunni Arab jihadis.

Iraq 's Shiites have grown increasingly impatient with the inability of the United States to curb Sunni attacks on their civilians. Many Shiites suspect that the United States, nervous about Iranian influence, is turning against them and moving back toward its traditional support of Arab Sunnis.

Enter the war in Lebanon.

> Iraqi Shiites, Mr. Nasr told me, have close ties to their co-religionists in Lebanon and are shocked by the U.S. support for Israeli bombing of Shiite areas. "Now, Iraqis see the United States as anti-Shia in Lebanon," Nasr says. "We are close to losing the Shia in Iraq."
>
> He worries that Shiite militias will soon start attacking U.S. troops, which would make a U.S. exit from Iraq almost inevitable.
>
> After that exit, a Shiite-Sunni civil war would explode into full force in Iraq, threatening Sunni regimes in the region and further driving up oil prices.
>
> Mr. Nasr argues that the United States would have been (and still would be) smarter to engage with Iran over Iraq and Lebanon. "This might create a certain stability that allows you to contain some of these trends," he says. "The moment of opportunity is fast closing."

San Francisco Chronicle

In "Iran asks to start nuclear bargaining: Offer to U.N. on enrichment called complex and vague," (*San Francisco Chronicle*, August 23 2006) staff writer Matthew B. Stannard, Chronicle Staff Writer writes:

> At the same time, Iran has little incentive to comply with the demand that it end its enrichment program, even with the threat of sanctions, said Vali Nasr, professor in the department of national security affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey and author of "The Shia Revival."
>
> "What's the day-after scenario for Iran (if it gives up enrichment)?" asked Nasr. "They still are not reconciled with the U.S. They still have not spoken one sentence with the U.S. The only thing they've done is given up the one thing the U.S. wants from them."

Asia Times

And, in "Iran's 'crisis' of overconfidence" (*Asia Times Online*, August 26, 2006), Jason Motlagh cites Dr. Nasr, writing:

> But despite Iran's leverage on the international energy market, current vogue on the Arab street and capacity to wreak havoc in Iraq and the Middle East at large via the Shi'ite militia alliance of Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Hamas and Syria, analysts say Iran wants to avoid an open conflict. Instead, Tehran "thinks [it] has a strong hand and wants to push for the maximum" in its nuclear negotiations, Vali Nasr, an Iran expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, told Asia Times Online. "The West responds better to an intransigent Iran."
>
> Nasr noted that Iran has internalized the rewards of its experience in driving a hard bargain. Under former president Mohammad Khatami, a leader far more conciliatory than Ahmadinejad, the European Union-3 (Britain, France and Germany) offered a less generous incentives package predicated on a guaranteed supply of fuel for civilian reactors provided they were under full supervision of the UN nuclear watchdog. In June,

after years of cat-and-mouse with the West, six industrial powers extended a sweeter offer, with further trade advantages and security guarantees, to a radical president with messianic tendencies who has hinted at the destruction of Israel.

As long as the UN appears soft, hamstrung by the lack of a clear US policy toward Iran, and there is reluctance on the part of trade partners Russia and China to enforce economic sanctions, more saber-rattling can be expected from Tehran, said Nasr. "A conflict could, however, result from a miscalculation," he said, adding that the Iranians "could overplay their hand."